

Bridging Worlds: Why Audette Exel Is A Global Leader for Tomorrow

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In her role as Founder and CEO of Adara Partners in Sydney, Australia, Audette Exel makes billion-dollar deals routinely. As a global financial leader, she's been honored as a global leader of tomorrow by the World Economic Forum. In her role with Adara Development, she is a visionary hero of philanthropy.

A member of YPO for 24 years, Exel is a world-renowned leader of the "for purpose" business movement. Her passion and commitment to support the most vulnerable communities both inspire and challenge business leaders who want to extend their reach and expand their mission.

The daughter of social activists, Exel grew up with a passion for social justice. She knew from a very young age that she wanted to lead a life that gave voice to the powerless.

"I don't remember a day in my life, not a single day, where I wasn't conscious of the fact that I was born a lucky little kiwi girl in a country where there was everything that I needed, food on the table, education, health, safety, people who love me," she says. "And yet, if I'd been born a little girl somewhere else in the world, my life would've been so profoundly different."



A love of “the deal”

In her last year of law school, Exel realized that to be effective, she also needed to understand the intrinsic relationship between money and power.

“I had a big moment when I was finishing my law degree, where I realized there’s this huge hole in my knowledge base around power and capital and I decided I was going to go learn Wall Street and investment banking, money and power.”

So, rather than begin upon the human rights path her friends expected her to follow, after graduation Exel joined a leading law firm where she specialized in international finance. In this arena, Exel learned to always play at the top of the game, with excellence and integrity.

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“First I thought of myself as a spy in the enemy camp,” Exel says. “Then I realized I really like these people and I *love* the deal.”

She rose quickly in the financial world, leaving Australia for Hong Kong and then the wider world, ending up in the reinsurance markets of Bermuda. At age 30, she became one of the youngest women to run a publicly traded bank, and over her four years at the helm, turned the bank’s prospects around.

“Once I stepped out of my tribe, I immediately recognized my prejudice and found that actually in the world of power and capital, there’s a huge amount of intent to affect change, a huge amount of integrity.”

Despite her meteoric rise in business, her passion for social justice was unwavering.

Bridging the divide

For Exel, the movement of power and money is a really important thing to understand if business leaders want to affect change. She loved her work but wanted to stop making money for the rich and start making money for the poor. After years of contemplation, she decided to bridge the divide between the worlds of profit and non-profit, forming Adara Group in 1998 to serve both worlds.

“Adara was born of the crazy idea that we could work with the most advantaged people to build corporate advice and use them for the sole purpose of supporting the most disadvantaged people on the planet,” she explains.

“People thought we were drug dealers or money launderers. They really did not believe that this was an appropriate use of business in the world.”



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/2wLnFx1Z8Ys>

The Adara Group believes each and every person should have access to quality health, education and other essential services, no matter where they live.

The first part of the Adara Group is an international development organization called Adara

Development that has expertise in maternal, newborn and child health, and remote community development. The second part of the Adara Group consists of two businesses, Adara Partners and Adara Advisors, which are 'for purpose' rather than for profit. Their sole objective is to fund Adara Development's administration and emergency project costs. This allows 100 percent of donations received by Adara Development to go directly to project-related costs.



Adara reaches more than 50,000 people living in poverty each year and countless more through knowledge sharing.

The best local teams are hired to implement their projects. "I get to work with heroes every day," Exel says of them. With a commitment to deep research, Adara listens to all the voices in the communities it serves, making sure projects are what the community needs and wants.

"I will not stop fighting until the day where every single little girl wakes up and knows that she has the same opportunity as every single little boy to make our world a kinder, more inclusive place." Audette Exel, Founder and CEO of Adara Partners

The impact

Through more than 20 years of work, Adara stands as a leader in maternal, newborn and child health, particularly in the care of low-birthweight and premature babies. They have worked with Kiwoko Hospital in Central Uganda since 1999, helping to develop a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) that was named a center of excellence in newborn care by the Ugandan Ministry of Health in 2018. This NICU cares for more than 1,200 newborns each year and survival in the unit is 90 percent. Working alongside the Ministry of Health, Adara is now sharing the knowledge from their 20 years of experience to reach more newborns across Uganda and beyond.

Adara is also a world-leader in remote service delivery. As part of this work, Adara has worked in Humla, a remote region in the Nepal Himalayas. Through this work, they have partnered with Yalbang School. In 2001, this school had just two students. It now has more than 360 students and 57 percent are girls. This is remarkable as historically girls did not have the opportunity to go to school.

In 2017, Yalbang School was named the best school in remote Nepal by the Ministry of Education among 30,000 government schools and 7,000 private schools. This school is now a model for remote education and has been replicated in other parts of Nepal.



Creating a model for growth

The next stage of their journey is to take this well-honed model and make it bigger, better and more impactful by sharing their knowledge with other organizations that wish to make a difference in the developing world.

"I cannot put into words how much this has enhanced my life," Exel says. "If they knew, *everyone* would be doing this because it is the best thing in the world ... The only thing I worry about is what else could I be doing? How can I touch more lives and do it better?"

Human rights and social justice still sit at the heart of everything Exel does. But now, she says, "I get the great fun of being in the game as well and using that background and that experience to benefit people, amazing heroes in extreme poverty around the world."

Exel was recently honored as YPO's 2018 Global Impact Legacy Honoree.